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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
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# ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ON ITS EIGHTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

Rapporteur: Ms. Aurora JAVATE DE DIOS

Addendum

## IV. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

### B. Consideration of reports

### Zimbabwe

1. The representative of Zimbabwe expressed her Government's commitment to the full implementation of the Convention and the achievement of gender equality. Much progress had been made in that area, including the establishment of the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women and the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights. A National Programme of Action and Vision 2020 had also been formulated, relevant legal provisions enacted and gender focal points appointed in all ministries. Despite this, prevailing negative attitudes towards women and discriminatory customary laws and practices continued to contribute to the slow pace in advancing the status of women.

2. Non-governmental organizations and research organizations specializing in gender and development issues had been consulted during the preparation of the report and were also active in promoting gender equality.

3. The representative noted that the Constitution had been amended in 1997 and now explicitly prohibited discrimination based on gender and that other legal

instruments, including the Sex Discrimination Removal Act, also prohibited discrimination based on sex.

4. The Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs had been established as the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women in 1981. Although the Ministry had since been dissolved, the National Machinery continued and gender focal points had been appointed in all line ministries.

5. The representative noted that an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights, which advised Government on human rights issues, had been established, and violations of human rights, including those relating to gender, could be investigated by the ombudsman.

6. Court procedures to improve the experience of victims, including provisions to allow for the taking of evidence in a separate room, had been introduced. Violence against women remained a serious problem and gender-sensitivity training had been introduced for police and judicial officers.

7. Affirmative action measures, in particular in the areas of education, employment and political participation and decision-making, had been introduced, but sex role stereotypes affected the attitudes of many Zimbabweans. In that regard, the Government had begun a programme to review school textbooks and a curriculum on human rights to be taught at the primary and secondary levels was being developed.

8. The representative indicated that HIV/AIDS was a serious problem in Zimbabwe and that the pandemic had increased the burden on women. Rural women generally remained very disadvantaged compared with their urban counterparts.

9. The representative concluded by noting that the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women had drawn up a list of statutes that did not comply with the Convention. In addition, the Convention had been translated into two major local languages and disseminated widely in simplified form.

## Concluding comments of the Committee

### Introduction

10. The Committee welcomed the State party's initial report, which was comprehensive and frank in its analysis of obstacles to implementation of the Convention. The Committee was also pleased to note that the report had been prepared in consultation with non-governmental organizations. Additional information that was provided by the oral presentation was also appreciated. The Committee welcomed the high-level delegation, which included the Minister of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperatives.

### Positive aspects

11. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the Government's strong commitment to advancing the status of women and commended it for establishing the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women after independence, as well as for assigning a gender focal point in each Ministry.

12. The Committee congratulated the Government for ratifying the Convention without reservations. Its translation into local languages for wider dissemination by the Government was also commended.

13. The establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights was noted with satisfaction, as was the strengthening of the office of the ombudsperson and the fact that it could now investigate the police and security forces.

14. The Committee commended the Government for putting in place clear and relevant national policies that were consistent with international agreements.

15. The Committee was also noted with satisfaction that the Constitution had been amended to prohibit any act of discrimination on the basis of sex.

16. Affirmative action taken to increase women's participation in rural councils and the gender-sensitive training given to police officers were two examples that the Committee referred to as commendable efforts on the part of the Government.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

17. The Committee noted with great concern that, although the national laws guaranteed the equal status of women, some of the customary laws made it possible for women to be discriminated against.

18. The Committee noted with dissatisfaction the prevailing traditional attitudes towards women, which helped to create and sustain negative images of women in society.

19. The Committee was informed that the ongoing structural adjustment programmes had compelled women to take low-paying employment.

Principal areas of concern

20. The Committee expressed its concern that discriminatory traditional practices, such as lobola, polygamy and female genital mutilation, were still accepted. Although the Constitution criminalized any act of discrimination on the ground of sex and, furthermore, the practice of lobola had been made illegal, tradition and customary law still ensured continued discrimination.

21. The Committee also noted with concern that much of the violence against women, especially in the domestic sphere, was not recognized by law. Violence against women was a serious violation of women's human rights. In addition, there was not enough support provided by the Government to help victims of violence, such as rehabilitation programmes and temporary shelters.

22. The Committee expressed its concern that the Ministry of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperation and the National Machinery for the Advancement of Women had no real power or responsibility to initiate and implement policy measures to eliminate discrimination against women.

23. While the Committee agreed with the effectiveness of having gender focal points in all ministries, it was convinced that a functional central coordinating body with a regular budget needed to be put in place.

24. The Committee was concerned at the low level of women's participation at the decision-making level.

25. The Committee noted with dissatisfaction that prostitutes were criminalized by law while their clients went unpunished. The Committee pointed out that women with low or no income often resorted to prostitution; migrant women sometimes also ended up in prostitution because of their vulnerability. The Committee was concerned that women from marginalized groups often ended up in prostitution.

26. The Committee expressed its concern that women in rural areas often suffered more as a result of prevailing negative attitudes and discriminatory traditional practices. Furthermore, women in rural areas often worked longer hours than any other group.

27. The Committee was concerned at the lack of support systems to enable pregnant teenagers to continue their schooling. The Committee also noted with dissatisfaction that there were no detailed statistics available on teenage pregnancy.

Suggestions and recommendations

28. The Committee urged the Government to take a more proactive role by introducing concrete measures to abolish all discriminatory customs and practices.

29. The Committee urged the Government to review the functions of the National Machinery with a view to providing it with the authority and financial resources to initiate and implement policy programmes to eliminate discrimination against women. The National Machinery should also act as a coordinating body for all the gender focal points of the ministries. A public awareness-raising campaign for gender equality should be organized by the National Machinery targeting both women and men. A campaign to promote positive images of women should also be organized, involving the mass media.

30. Gender-sensitive training should be extended to all sectors, including medical and paramedical personnel.

31. The Committee further recommended that the President and the ministers be briefed regularly on the progress in implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action and also to ensure that they were accountable for gender-mainstreaming within their respective departments.

32. The Committee recommended as a necessary temporary measure the use of affirmative action to promote the status of women in all spheres of society.

33. The Committee also suggested that the Government extend the function of the office of the ombudsperson to the private sector.

34. The Committee recommended to the Government that it codify family and customary laws, incorporating only the positive traditional customs and practices.

35. On prostitutes, the Committee agreed that it was necessary to help them rebuild their lives. The Committee strongly recommended, however, that the Government should put in place and implement preventive measures, which were essential to redress a situation that forced women into prostitution.

36. The Committee suggested that the Government review the law prohibiting abortion and provide sex education to both youth and adults.

37. The Committee requested more detailed data and adequate information on violence against women, prostitution, teenage pregnancy and young mothers' ability to continue their education, and also on trafficking in women.

38. The Government was requested to utilize the Committee's general recommendations in order to plan measures to advance the status of women and to implement them more effectively.

39. The Committee requested the Government to disseminate its concluding comments widely so that individuals would become more aware of the measures that had been taken to implement the Convention and also of the remaining steps that were required to achieve de facto equality for women.

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